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**Consumer Opinions on Branded Mobile Applications**

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# **Consumer Opinions on Branded Mobile Applications**

**by**

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## **Report**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**December 2010**

## **Abstract**

### **Consumer Opinions on Branded Mobile Applications**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

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Advertising is moving from a more traditional, paid placement into a new digital and mobile era. Companies are trying to figure out how to reach consumers in new ways, and emerging technologies are assisting. Branded mobile applications are one way that companies are working to build brand image and advertise in an innovative way. In this research, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted to find out what consumers may want, look for, and expect from a branded mobile application. Secondary research was also conducted to find out how brands are leveraging these new technologies and what consumers can look for in the future of mobile advertising. After reading this paper, the reader will have further knowledge of what consumers are seeking in mobile branded applications and how to obtain and keep their attention with a mobile application.

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Literature Review .....	3
Mobile Applications .....	3
Branded Entertainment .....	6
Consumer Insight .....	8
Methodology .....	11
Discussion .....	13
General Findings .....	13
Utility .....	14
Originality .....	18
Trustworthiness .....	23
Conclusions .....	27
Limitations and Future Research .....	28
Bibliography .....	29

## **Introduction**

In 2010, a shift is underway in the world of advertising. As new technologies emerge, consumer control increases and companies must come up with novel ways to reach them. In 1990, there was no iPod, DVR, Kindle, and no smartphone. If you wanted to advertise your product, an agency put a campaign together and pushed the information out via magazines, newspaper, television or radio. Occasionally they may do a promotion, event, or product placement. Today, if a brand chooses to advertise only in this fashion, it risks becoming obsolete. The marketing mix is evolving quickly and consumers are demanding more than ever.

In 2010 if a consumer has a bad experience, say for instance on Southwest Airlines, all it takes is a post on Twitter and people are talking about it. (Lee 2010) Social media is the new word-of-mouth. Consumers demand what information they want when they want it. Advertisers have had to adapt to stay current by using branded entertainment, social media, user-generated content and more. As with any new technology, there is a learning curve when it comes to effectively reaching out to a consumer. In this research, I focused on one of the recent ways brands are trying to interact with a new savvy consumer: branded mobile applications.

Since the iPhone debuted in 2007 and began allowing developers to create web-based applications, companies have been coming up with ideas. Some of the ideas have worked better than others. Chipotle has an iPhone app that allows users to create a burrito of their dreams then pick it up at the nearest location. Nike has a variety of apps including Nike+ GPS, which tracks a runner's route, mileage and calories. BMW came out with a game application that allows users to race Formula 1 cars. In fact, it is tough to think of a mainstream consumer-targeted brand that DOESN'T have a mobile application. For this research, I decided to check in with consumers to see what they like and dislike in branded apps. In a marketplace that is quickly evolving, consumers have the loudest voice, so it seemed like a worthwhile idea. In this research you will learn what attracts consumers to certain branded apps and what utilities they prefer an application to have. It will provide a unique insight into consumer perspectives and possibly provide ideas for future branded application development.

## **Literature Review**

### **Mobile Applications**

If you asked somebody in 2006 what the coolest feature of their cell phone was they might say, “texting” or if they were one of the first people to have a smartphone, “e-mail” could be an option. But that all changed in June 2007 when Apple released the iPhone. The revolutionary phone combined a phone, iPod, GPS, calendar, and more. According to the press release:

“iPhone introduces an entirely new user interface based on a revolutionary multi-touch display and pioneering new software that allows users to control iPhone with just a tap, flick or pinch of their fingers. iPhone combines three products into one small and lightweight handheld device—a revolutionary mobile phone, a widescreen iPod, and the Internet in your pocket with best-ever applications on a mobile phone for email, web browsing and maps.

iPhone ushers in an era of software power and sophistication never before seen in a mobile device, which completely redefines what users can do on their mobile phones.” (iPhone Premieres This Friday Night at Apple Retail Stores, 2007)

In what seemed like a blink of an eye, the entire world of mobile, advertising and beyond had changed. Newer versions of iPhones and other similar smartphones like Blackberry, Android, and more followed. Beyond technology, there was a change in people. Consumers who have smartphones are constantly connected via

e-mail, texting and social media. Some check their phones before they go to bed and right when they wake up (Sutter 2010). As of November 2010, twenty eight percent of U.S. mobile subscribers have smartphones and the numbers are growing (Mobile Snapshot: Smartphones Now 28% of U.S. Cellphone Market, 2010). The consumer is shifting almost as quickly as the technology itself.

In June 2007, Apple announced another revolution to mobile- third party Web 2.0 applications (iPhone to Support Third-Party Web 2.0 Applications, 2007). For the first time, developers could come up with applications to run on phones and the opportunities for what they could do were seemingly endless. Gone were the days of using a cell phone for simply making a call or sending a text message- from this point on, users could play games on their phones, look up relevant information, and better organize their lives. In December of 2010, the world of mobile applications goes well beyond the iPhone. Brands like Blackberry, Android, and others all have their own application stores and a variety of downloadable apps. According to research firm IDC, there will be more than a 300,000 applications available on the iPhone alone by the end of 2010 (Perez 2009).

Right from the start, companies began trying to think of new ways to reach out to consumers using branded mobile applications. The idea that a consumer could take a brand everywhere they go and be carried in their pocket seemed like a company's



ultimate goal (Morrissey, 2009). Consumers were open to the idea as well. According to a report from Admob done in August 2009, 70% of people who used smartphones had already downloaded apps from brands and over 60% said that they would be interested in downloading one (Lardinois 2009). With so many applications available, advertisers are beginning to wonder which branded apps stand out and what consumers are looking for when downloading. Furthermore, a seemingly endless amount of brands have joined the application bandwagon: from Wrigley and Coca-Cola to Bank of America, Gap, Pizza Hut and beyond (Makkar 2010). Developers and advertisers are curious to know what will make an application stand out, get downloaded, and stay relevant.

Matt Kapko's article "Secrets Behind 3 Branded iPhone App Successes" documents Zippo, Kraft, and REI's achievements in the branded application field. Each of these apps has a different function and each has been successful in targeting its consumer and staying true to brand identity. The Zippo application is, essentially, a virtual lighter. The flame is displayed on the iPhone screen and it reacts to movement and sounds using the phone's gyroscope and microphone. REI's app, on the other hand, is informational. REI Snow Report gives users information on how much snow different mountains have so they can easily access that information when they want to ski or snowboard. It doesn't directly tie to the clothing and gear manufacturer but it does hit their key demographic. Finally the Kraft application, iFood Assistant,

charges the user to download the app but it has added features like recipes and instructional videos that provide users value for their investment (Kapko 2010).

### **Branded Entertainment**

Many people consider a branded mobile application to be a form of branded entertainment. To further explore this idea I turned to Hudson and Hudson's article, "Branded Entertainment: A New Advertising Technique or Product Placement in Disguise?" which examines and contextualizes the main ideas of branded entertainment. In the article branded entertainment is described as when "...Branded products are no longer just 'placed'; they are woven into entertainment content making a stronger emotional connection with the consumer. The outcome is a... convergence of advertising and entertainment." (Hudson and Hudson 2006) According to the authors, plain product placement (for example, Coca Cola cups in front of judges on American Idol) does not constitute branded entertainment but integration into the plot of a reality show (like "The Apprentice" contestants thinking of a new Colgate toothpaste flavor) is branded entertainment. It is not considered to be entertainment if it is just product placement. Rather the advertisement has to weave itself in with entertaining content (Hudson and Hudson 2006). The idea of doing this in a mobile context means providing the consumer with a valid branded application that gives them something more than a catalog of

services or products. People will use the application not to see the product or hear about attributes, but rather to be engaged by the original content.

In their article, “How Will Digital Platforms be Harnessed in 2010, and How Will They Change the Way People Interact with Brands?” Martin and Todorov provide an up-to-date look at the way people use brands for entertainment and information. The authors discussed five levels of engagement- the Gag (where the consumer thinks something is funny), Utility (when something provides value), Social Connectivity (when a brand interacts with people), Brand Customization (when an individual can make it theirs), and Brand Lifestyle (when customers truly live the brand). (Martin and Todorov 2010) These levels are important in seeing what consumers like and have come to expect from branded content. The article uses the example of Nike+ as a utility application that has gone all the way and managed to become a lifestyle brand by incorporating all of the features into an iPod application and eventually an iPhone application as well.

Scott Donaton’s book *Madison and Vine* thoroughly examines the integration of entertainment and advertising focusing on a key element: the consumer. Donaton believes that in order to make a branded entertainment conversion work the consumer must be taken into account. According to the book, coming up with a vehicle for consumers to interact with brands, rather than as a way to push

messages is at them, is a key component to a successful campaign. “The push model is dead. Consumers now ‘pull’ media toward them and have the ability to screen out those things that they don’t want.” (Donaton 2004, 9) Donaton uses a variety of examples to showcase failures and success stories while trying to integrate entertaining content with lifestyle brands. He argues that the convergence of entertainment and advertising among quickly changing technologies is the future (Donaton 2004). This applies to branded applications because ultimately the consumer decides which apps to download and which to keep and use on their mobile device.

### **Consumer Insight**

David Rondeau’s article, “For Mobile Applications, Branding is Experience,” touches on what makes a branded application relevant to consumers. He argues that the most important thing that a branded app can be is useful. “If an application is not useful, it won’t get used—if it doesn’t get used, it will eventually be deleted from the device to make room for a more useful application.” (Rondeau 2005, 65) He also suggests product design, visual design, and usability as key elements to a successful smartphone application.

In the Brandweek article “Mobile Marketing Fantasy Vs. Reality” by Kenneth Hein, some current trends and gaps in the industry are pointed out. Contrary to what

some suspected, consumers are open to making purchases on their phones, as companies such as Pizza Hut have shown. They also like applications to entertain them and provide something useful. “Too many people pigeonhole mobile marketing as just being ringtones or wallpapers,” said Air2Web's Jones... Brands that sponsor services that tell users things like where the is nearest baby-changing station or where is the store where I can buy what I need, will thrive...Soon,’ he said, ‘mobile devices won't simply be a push medium.’” (Hein 2008)

So what is it that consumers really want in a branded mobile application? In Alan Wolk’s article “Best and Worst Practices for Building Branded Apps,” he encourages companies who are considering building an app to focus on aesthetics, promotions, asking “why?” and timing. According to Wolk, the worst applications on the market are useless, have little novelty, serve only as advertisement, are poorly designed, do not work, or are inappropriate (Wolk 2010).

A 2009 article from the International Journal of Mobile Marketing found that a brand’s message credibility has a major impact on consumer attitudes toward mobile advertising (Jun Ma, Suntornpithug, Karaatli 2009). Furthermore, the article suggests that companies should concentrate on building their credibility among consumers. One way to do this is by making advertising only a part of the overall mobile marketing strategy and potentially adding an entertainment tool.

For this research paper, I interviewed a variety of people to see what they like and dislike about branded applications. Consumer insight is key to the successful development and implementation of a branded mobile application. It is simple enough to develop an app and get it out in the market, but it is difficult to develop something that people actually use and engage with on a regular basis. The purpose of this research is to talk with smartphone users about their application habits and preferences.

## **Methodology**

In order to discover consumer insights on their opinions of branded mobile apps, I put together an exploratory study. I employed an exploratory research design, and collected primary data in the form of depth interviews and drew heavily from extant literature to best understand the topic. Because mobile applications are a recent phenomenon, there are a shortage of peer-reviewed articles about them so I supplemented with current trade press and similar articles and studies.

For the primary research I conducted 12 in-depth interviews with current smartphone consumers (Spiggle, 1994). I used a convenience sample selected from personal contacts. Informants were all residing in Austin, Texas. A majority of the respondents were Caucasian. The informants ranged in age from early-twenties to mid-forties. 60% of the respondents were male and 40% were female. Consumers who owned smartphones were purposely targeted so they could adequately answer questions about mobile applications. Interviewees mostly had iPhones but some had Android, Blackberry, Palm, and HTC. I chose not to focus only on iPhone because there are a variety of phones and applications out there and I wanted to get a wide perspective. In order to protect the privacy of my participants, their names have been changed to pseudonyms in this paper. (See Table 1 for a listing of all respondents quoted within this paper).

Table 1: Participant information: respondents quoted

Participant Name	Participant Age	Participant Gender	Participant Occupation
Dana	52	Female	Consulting
Chase	25	Male	PHD student
Gary	25	Male	PHD student
Allison	25	Female	Engineering
Natalie	25	Female	Marketing
Doug	23	Male	Engineering
Tommy	26	Male	Marketing
Adam	35	Male	Marketing
Keith	28	Male	Fitness

I performed all the in-depth interviews face-to-face during the month of October 2010. The length of the interviews varied, some were as short as 40 minutes, and others were as long as 90 minutes, depending on the informant's knowledge of smartphones and applications. On average, the interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. Informants provided basic demographic data, and contact information for subsequent verification of accuracy (Spiggle, 1994). Interviews were recorded and transcribed. After transcription, the audio recordings were deleted.

The purpose of the in-depth interview was to have a conversation and find out how users really feel about smartphones, applications, and brands. After the interviews were transcribed, I came up with some common themes and keywords.

Interpretations of emergent themes were derived directly from interview transcripts, interviewer notes and the existing literature. I came up with three prominent themes: usability, trustworthiness, and originality.



## **Discussion**

### **General Findings**

The in-depth interviews provided some very constructive information. Each person interviewed had an average of 35 applications on their cell phone, a little higher than the national average, 22 (The State of Mobile Apps, 2010). The most frequently used application was also most well liked application: Facebook. Interviewees liked being able to look at Facebook during down time to connect with their friends, write updates, and post photos. Seeing as how a cell phone, in essence, is a social device this seemed to make sense. 100% of the users interviewed had the Facebook application on their phones. Other popular branded applications were Bank of America, Yelp, Pandora, and ESPN ScoreCenter.

Through the interviews, three main themes of what consumers prefer in branded mobile applications became evident: utility, originality, and trustworthiness. Utility, for the purpose this paper is defined as being something useful, which helps people with their everyday lives. Originality means an application that goes beyond a simple mobile web site and does something unique and cool. Trustworthiness goes into how users download branded apps because they associate brand names with quality and reliability.

## Utility

Since mobile applications are somewhat new, it's hard to predict what will really engage users. Through the interviews I conducted, a common topic became "What can an app do for me?" Mobile users want applications that help them in their day-to-day activities. Previous research shows that part of what attracts consumers to smartphones is mobility, immediacy, and instrumentality (Leung and Wei 2000). Researchers Chang Hyun Jin and Jorge Villegas' looked at uses and gratifications of mobile phones and found that consumers want their phone to provide utility of things like banking, shopping, communication, and gaming (Jin and Villegas 2008). Natalie, a busy professional and active volunteer said:

"I like the apps on my phone that serve as tools. I use it as a reminder tool, a scheduling tool, an alarm clock... I have an alarm clock beside my bed but I use my phone instead. It helps me with my daily life. "

Mobile phone applications can help in a variety of ways from letting consumers easily interact with their friends like Facebook does, or helping them with their calendar, work, interests, and beyond. 52-year-old Blackberry user Dana said:

"I like a simple interface that does something elegantly and efficiently. It doesn't need to do everything, just do what it does extraordinarily well and be simple in its implementation and use."

Another important utility feature to consider is how often the user will want to access and interact with the application. According to Gary, a 25-year old Ph.D. student,

“If there’s an app that I’m not going to use at least once a week I’m probably not going to download it. Like the ESPN SportsCenter app- I only got that because I know that every Saturday I’m going to want to look up the scores- they update in real time. But if I was only going to use it once a month I wouldn’t download it.”

Ideally from a company’s perspective, the user will be engaging with the application as much as possible (Morrissey 2009). The consumer also wants something that they use frequently because many of them believe that having a lot of apps that use sparingly can be pointless. According to Chase, a 25-year-old Ph.D. student,

“If I’m not going to use apps then I don’t want them cluttering my screen. It’s not that I have to get rid of them it’s just- if I’m only using them once every blue moon then I forget I even have them. Why even have them on my darn phone?”

Similarly, Keith, a 28-year old professional explained, “Obviously you want something straightforward. You know something where you know the utility is. I don’t want it to use up memory on my phone if it’s worthless to me.”

The consumers I interviewed disliked applications that were difficult to use or that did not have a clear use at all. Dana notes,

“Verizon has an app that in my opinion was developed to grab and use bandwidth. The app took forever to load and was very graphic intensive. It took forever to do anything on or with it. I deleted it within two days. It was supposed to consolidate news, weather, and be customizable with areas of my interest. It didn’t perform as advertised and it didn’t work.”

Others described similar experiences when they went to download an application and found that it was not what they expected or that it did not work efficiently and they deleted it.

Consumers are looking for applications that make their lives easier. According to 25-year-old professional Allison, the entire point of having a smart phone is usability:

“The best part about having an iPhone is that I can pretty much go anywhere without a plan and I can figure out wherever I need to go and find what I need to find while I’m out doing it. I don’t necessarily need to map out my route or look up where this restaurant is before I go and if I’m out and have a change of plans I can just look up what I need to do. “

Tommy is a 26-year-old student who frequently uses mobile applications. Of all the people I spoke with, Tommy had the highest number of applications (86) downloaded on his phone. Even though he is a big app-user, his favorites are the ones that perform tasks.

“I like apps for what they do. For Chipotle I can order a burrito on my phone and then go pick it up which I really like... I also really like Evernote because anything I write on my phone it saves to a server online and it syncs up on my computer and it's really easy. I use it to type notes for school, grocery lists, it even takes photos.”

Doug, a 23-year-old engineer, believes that branded applications can go right or wrong depending on the usability.

“I think [branded apps] are very useful if there's some kind of thing it can be used for: so communicating with people, ordering a pizza, reserving a table at restaurant, purchasing or shopping something- all those apps are great. The apps that, to me, seem worthless are branded apps where it's strictly an advertising app. GM has an app that doesn't do anything other than reading some news articles about the company. It's not really a functional app it's more of just a way of them publishing some information or a marketing gimmick. Those, in my mind, don't really do all that much for the end user. Sure you can say you've reached some people as another method of

advertising but it's not an app that's actually useful, or functional, or entertaining."

Many of the consumers interviewed indicated that they do not like to feel like a branded application is trying to sell something or advertise to them. Chase added:

"I've deleted apps that don't have a value other than just being a quick link to a web site type thing. That to me doesn't strike me as being an app. When I think of an app it's more than that, it's the value added. It interacts with your GPS it knows more about you and what not. The apps that I think have deleted have been more brochures and not as useful or interactive."

It is not uncommon for an advertising agency to come up with an idea for a branded application and go crazy with it. It is important for brands and advertisers to remember that the application does not just have to look cool or be interesting once, but it should really perform an action that will do something useful for the end user in a way that is a step up. An app that is useless may be downloaded and looked at, but consumers strongly prefer an program that efficiently performs tasks.

### **Originality**

"The propensities of consumers to adopt novel products, whether they are ideas, goods, or services, can play an important role in theories of brand loyalty, decision

making, preference, and communication.” (Hirschman 1980, 283) According to the consumers I interviewed, attractive mobile applications should be different, cool, and unique. Of course “cool” means different things to different people, but the idea is to make an application that does something you may have never seen before or does something in a new, innovative way. Keeping in mind the previous section about usability, the consumers I spoke to especially like useful apps that have aspects of originality. Natalie explained, “I’m always looking for an app that teaches me something or that can help me along the way.”

The originality factor really stood out when I asked interviewees about their favorite mobile applications. Allison enjoyed the application that was developed to go along with the annual Austin City Limits music festival.

“My favorite app is ACL fest even though I only used it for that festival week. I like it because it had a really good purpose and it made going to the concert for that weekend so much easier because you could choose all the bands you wanted to hear and it would create your own lineup on the phone and it had the map to show you what stage to go to so it was all there so you didn’t have to write it out or fill out a paper. “

Doug, on the other hand, likes the all-in-one innovation of the Mint.com application.

“I’d probably say my favorite is the Mint.com personal finance app. The cool thing is that because it’s linked in to all my financial accounts I can go to one place and it has a whole dashboard of anything financially related. So say I want to check my bank account balances that I have at two different banks, instead of having to log into two separate accounts websites or use two different iPhone apps for each bank, I can go there and see everything in one place. I like it because it’s super convenient and it has a lot of pertinent information in one place.”

Finally, Chase’s favorite is Yelp, which lets users find local places, restaurants, and reviews.

“I like Yelp a lot because it helps me to figure out what’s near me that’s kind of cool, trendy, or interesting. It’s a great app that shows some creativity and it’s useful. If I’m trying to find something to eat or something to do I can just go on there and it will locate me and show me what’s open and what’s around. It’s really helpful when you’re traveling too.”

According to the people I interviewed, an application should be different than a mobile web page. Doug explains,

“Wells Fargo has an app but it’s no different than if you go to Wells Fargo online in the web browser. It puts the logo at the top but it’s just a window to



their web site. So it's an app- it works, I can log in and transfer money and use it but it's not a full-blown native app and I don't like that. I've even actually thought about switching to Bank of America for my banking because I think they're a more technologically friendly company and I know they have a really cool app."

Keith told me that the main reason he's never purchased an application is because he hasn't found anything he thinks is novel enough. "Most things you can get on the internet so since you have a browser you don't need to buy it. I haven't found an app yet that I feel like I would pay for." Tommy agrees, "I feel like if I can't Google it on my phone then it's worth downloading. If I can do it already somehow or it's been done before then I don't really see the point in downloading it."

As far as what consumers would like to see in smartphone applications, many people want a higher level of customization and personalization. Allison said,

"I'd like an app that knew your preferences and knew what you like to do and every day it would send you a recommended activity or place to go or thing to see. That would be cool."

On a related note, Keith explained,

“I like apps that offer something that you can’t get in another way. I guess I could get all of my NFL stuff on the web but my app gives it to me in another way since I can customize my content.”

When I asked consumers if they would download a branded app from one of their favorite brands, originality was a big point. Natalie told me:

“I’d like an app for Target that would show you new things at Target or what they’re doing at stores, or specials, coupons or something like that. I’d even consider paying for that if they had a monthly coupon or a special event you could attend.”

Tommy also liked the idea of brands providing specials through their applications.

“I would like a Diesel app if it was free and if it showed me current styles, future stuff, video stuff I think would be interesting. But see but that’s a problem. I could go to Diesel’s web site and have it be the same thing so it would have to be something different or something special like a coupon or notices of sales- that would be really cool.”

## **Trustworthiness**

The last trend that stood out from the interviews was the idea that consumers may be more drawn to branded mobile applications because they find them to be trustworthy. Past research shows that trust can affect consumer value perceptions (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, and Sabol 2002), choices (Erdem and Swait 2004), and commitment/loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001). Knowing all of this it is very important for a company to seem trustworthy to a consumer. There is a certain expectation that comes with a branded application because the company can become tied to the application so users who have a bad experience may feel more negatively about the corporation in general and vice versa. Natalie believes name recognition plays a big part in downloading branded applications. "I'd be more inclined to download from a recognized source than pick a name I did not recognize."

When a company comes out with an application it may effect how users see that brand. According to Sarah, a 25-year old student, "Having an app means they're a more established company. I can't imagine a mom and pop store having an app." Allison believes that having a branded application may further tie her to a corporation.

"Having a brand's app might make me more loyal to a company because they have gone out of their way to make it easy for me to access their product or

whatever it is and the fact that I'm seeing their icon on the phone everyday might make me subconsciously more loyal to them or more inclined to use their product or service."

When shopping for an application that does a particular function, most people I spoke to prefer to download a branded application because they feel like they can trust that company. Allison says,

"I'd definitely be more likely to download a branded app as opposed to a non-branded app. I would automatically think that the branded app is more trustworthy and functional, and maybe it would be easier to use too. Plus I think that simply recognizing that brand visually would automatically attract me to it as well."

Timmy told me:

"I have the Betty Crocker recipe app- it could be argued that I could just download a regular [non-branded] recipe app. But I guess it's more of what I trust and what I use."

Having a name brand name on the application also comes with a certain level of accountability, according to 34-year-old Adam.

"I would think that the branded app has more of a PR problem if there is a problem with it, and a small unbranded, unknown app developer has nothing

to lose. When the Facebook app leaks personal information, that's a HUGE problem that will be addressed immediately. An unknown developer leaking personal information might not even be noticed or picked up by the press."

Gary expands on this idea:

"Larger companies with more ubiquitous brands are held more accountable for the quality of their products because they have more at stake. An off-brand app that isn't very good just gets tossed aside and won't influence my purchasing decisions in the future. But if, say, the Google app were poorly designed or leaked my personal information, I would be reluctant to support Google's other products and services."

Craig also mentioned brand name accountability in safeguarding his personal information.

"When it comes to protecting personal data, I think trust becomes a more decisive factor for me. I trust Google with a lot of my personal data, but I would never even consider using email or photo-sharing services from another company that lacked a track record of protecting user information. I would opt to download an app from a brand I trust is responsible with my personal information if I knew this information was being used/transmitted by the app."

Users expect more with a branded application as well especially if the brand is known for a particular function, as Doug explains.

“If I’m looking to an app that does something for GPS tracking and I see Garmin, and Tom Tom, I’m going to see those name brands and associate them with quality and have expectations. Like Garmin is a major GPS manufacturer so you’d expect that their app would have the same type of quality as if you went and bought one of their products. So that may influence me into buying that versus some no name GPS app that I’ve never heard of but at the same time if you buy a Garmin app and it ends up being really crappy, well you may think it’s crappy because you were expecting it to be way awesome, some other preconceived notion.”

If the application is to be used for making purchases, users especially want to feel like they can rely the brand associated with the app. According to Timmy,

“I don’t mind putting in my credit card information on a branded app because I know and trust it. “ Chase also trusts his finances with apps that are from well-known brands. “At first glance, I am more likely to download an app from a company I trust, especially if I’ve had good experiences with their products and am familiar with their practices. For instance, if I saw a long list of personal finance apps, I would rather trust my personal data with a company like Bank of America that I’ve heard positive things about rather than an unheard of firm. “

## **Conclusions**

As companies continue to develop, build, and test branded mobile applications it is important for them to strongly consider the end user (consumer) preferences. In talking with my interviewees I found that most users want a branded app that is useful, different, and dependable. At the end of the day an application is supposed to perform a function to entertain, assist, educate, or socialize. If a user downloads a mobile application that does not seem to perform any of these functions, or does not have a strong sense utility, they will likely delete it. A branded application that has a clear use that consumers will want to use frequently is ideal. Furthermore branded applications should be unique and original- distinctive from just a mobile web site. A clear, easy to use design that is enjoyable and inventive for the user is optimal. Lastly, one of the reasons a branded application is downloaded in the first place is because the user recognizes and has faith in the company. Increased importance is placed in a branded mobile application's responsibility to put out a secure and reliable product. If a branded application fails on this account, it can affect consumer perceptions of the corporation. For a branded mobile application to be successful it should listen to consumer insights and concentrate on utility, innovation, and accountability.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Some possible limitations of this study exist. The sample I used was not a random sample and only spoke to the opinions of people I know who live in Austin, Texas. All of the people I spoke to had the minimum education level of a college degree. A majority of my sample was Caucasian. Certain assumptions were made in this study that respondents answered truthfully to the best of their knowledge. This research has a limited scope and had no budget to work with. This research took place over one semester. Future research could certainly be done using a more diverse sample with an increased budget and time frame.

As mobile technologies continue to progress, the ideas for new branded applications are limitless. Future research should continue to focus on a conversation between consumers and brands in order to best serve a company's target market. Much more research can be done on consumer smartphone usage as well as consumer perceptions about mobile applications. If more research is done on a larger scale, brands can do less guessing and come up with more effective, useful and original applications that consumers enjoy using.



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